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## International trends in English language assessment: implications for Bangladesh

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# International trends in English language assessment: Implications for Bangladesh

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*EIA Policy seminar series 2: English Language Skills Assessment in the Primary and Secondary Education Sectors in Bangladesh, English in Action & National Curriculum & Textbook Board, Dhaka Bangladesh, 16 – 17 March 2014*

# Overview



- Language assessment: what do we mean?
- Why assess a learner's language abilities?
- A historical perspective of language assessment
- Classroom-based language assessment
- Impact of language assessment
- Case studies from other countries
- Local study: EIA
- Implications for Bangladesh
- Questions or comments



# Language assessment: what do we mean?



- What does it mean to you?

"In the context of language teaching and learning, 'assessment' refers to the act of collecting information and making judgments about a language learner's knowledge of a language and ability to use it."

Carol Chapelle and Geoff Brindley, Universities of Iowa State and Macquarie. (cited in Glen Fulcher <http://languagetesting.info/whatis/lt.html> )

# Language assessment



- A social and political activity? ([McNamara, 2011](#))
- Consequences for wider society
- Political decisions
- Economic activities





# Why assess a learner's language abilities?



- Think about the question ....
- Main purpose :
- Make decisions
  - High-stakes and low-stakes
    - Selection
    - Placement
    - Diagnosis (formative)
    - Progress (formative)
    - Grading (summative)
    - Teacher performance
    - Suitability of a programme or policy



([Bachman & Palmer, 1996](#); [McNamara & Roever, 2006](#))

# A historical perspective of language assessment



- Focus on accuracy until 1970s
  - Grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and essay
- Focus on communication:
- Advent of communicative language teaching in the 1970s ([Hymes, 1972](#))
- Real use of language in a social context
- Shift towards a social dimension of ELT
- Beginning of communicative language testing and assessment ([Canale & Swain, 1980](#))
- Move towards assessing students' language skills in a range of contexts ([Taylor, 2006](#))

# Classroom-based language assessment



- Rise of classroom-based language assessment in both developed and developing countries ([Davison & Leung, 2009](#))
- Different terms used
  - Teacher-based assessment
  - Alternative assessment
  - Assessment for learning
  - School-based assessment
  - Formative assessment





# Classroom-based language assessment



Definition of classroom-based language assessment:

- ‘any reflection by **teachers** (and/or **learners**) on the qualities of a learner’s (or group of learners’) work and the use of that information by **teachers** (and/or **learners**) for teaching, learning (feedback), reporting, management or socialization purposes.’( bold mine, [Hill & McNamara, 2012, p. 396](#))
- Classroom-based assessment increasingly supported by government policies
- Continuous evaluation cycle (being tried in India)

# Dynamic assessment (DA)



- an “approach to understanding individual differences and their implications for instruction ... [that] embeds intervention within the assessment procedure” (Lidz and Gindis, 2003 p.99).
- Focus on future language abilities rather than past ones
- Often used in clinical psychology and special needs education ([Haywood & Lidz, 2007](#))
- Recently tried in classroom-based language assessment ([Lantolf & Poehner, 2011](#); [Shrestha & Coffin, 2012](#))



# Language portfolio



‘a systematic and selective collection of a student’s work that has been assembled to demonstrate a student’s motivation, academic growth and level of achievement’ ([Norton & Wiburg, 1998, p. 237](#))

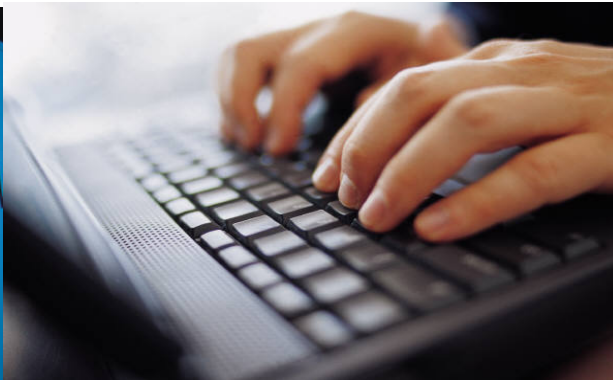
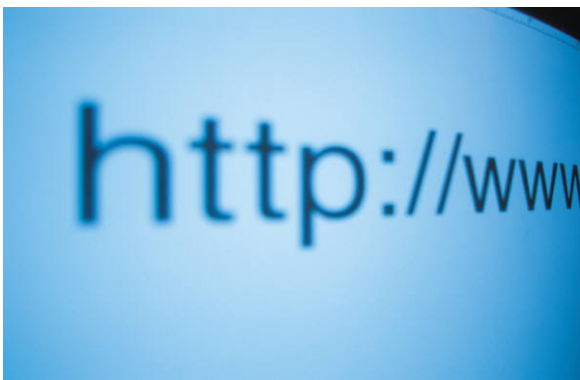


Courtesy: <http://blog.calicospanish.com/portfolio>



# Technology in language assessment

- Computer-based assessment
- Use of mobile devices
- Use of internet
- Digital Bangladesh



# Impact of assessment



- Teaching and learning
- Wider society
- Positive
- Negative

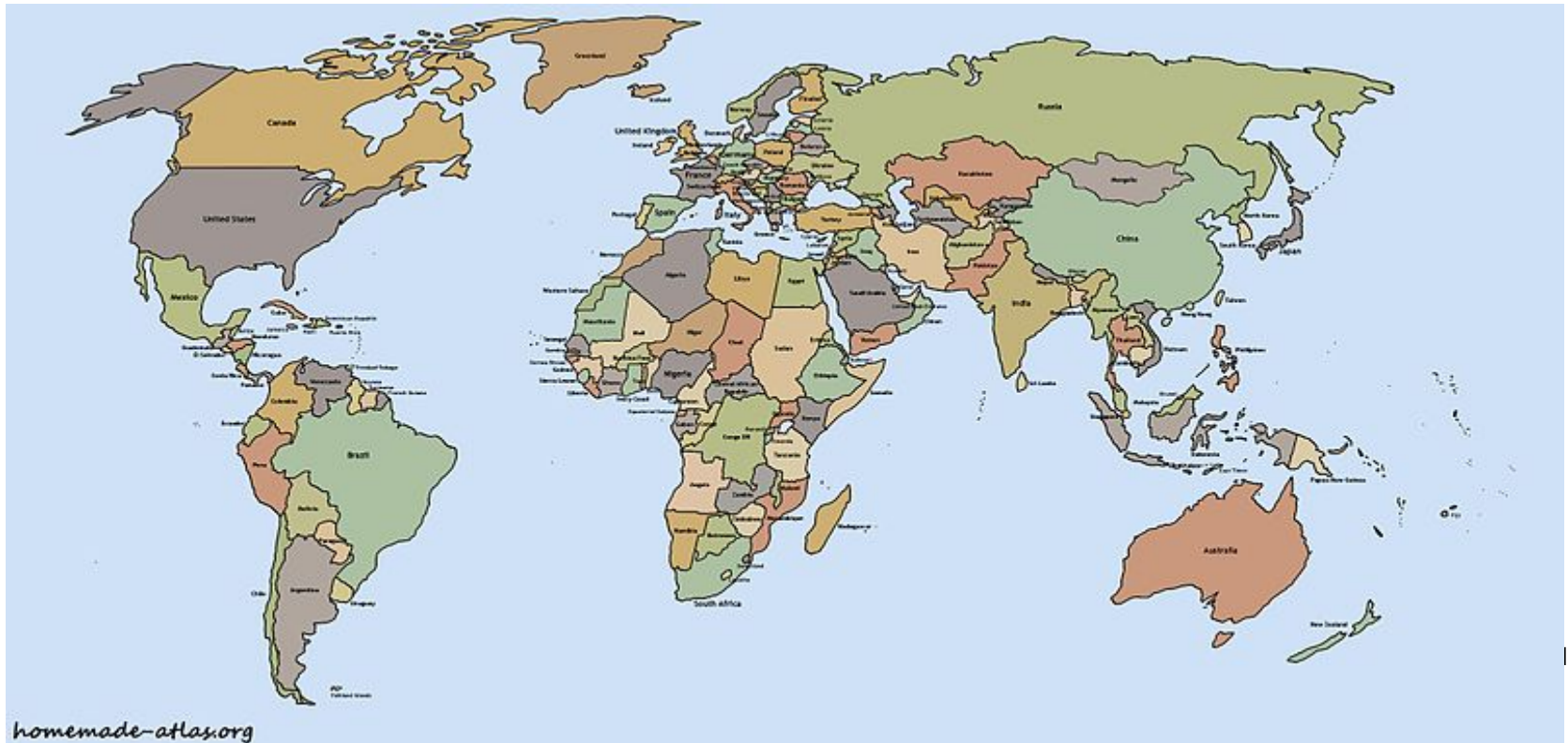




# Case studies from other countries



- Hong Kong
- Japan
- Macedonia
- Malaysia
- New Zealand
- Thailand



# Hong Kong (Berry, 2011; Hamp-Lyons, 2009)



- Predominantly exam-oriented education system
- Assessment reform in 1990s
- Further reform in 2000s: move towards assessment for learning
- Emphasis on link between assessment and teaching and learning
- Basic Competency Assessment – low-stakes; enhance teaching and learning
- Oral assessment for English language
- School-based assessment in 2001
- Comprehensive professional development materials for oral English SBA
- Resistance from teachers and negative attitudes of school personnel
- Need for an increased understanding of SBA among stakeholders

# Japan (Sasaki, 2008)



- Introduction of communicative English language syllabus in 1990s
- Emphasis on practical communication skills (impact of globalisation)
- Use of criterion-referenced assessment (i.e., meeting criteria)
- Commercial tests used by higher secondary schools (e.g., TOEIC)
- Emphasis on teacher professional development

## Macedonia ([Murchan, Shiel, & Mickovska, 2012](#))



- Medium of instruction in four languages in schools: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian
- Teachers solely responsible for assessment in primary schools (teacher autonomy)
- Launch of school-based assessment in 2008 (on-going):
- Development of assessment standards and ethics
- Comprehensive professional development of teachers, administrators regarding assessment
- Repository of print and digital learning resources on assessment

# Malaysia (Lan Ong, 2010)



- Primarily dominated by centralised public examinations
- Primary education – external exam on reading skills in English
- Lower secondary – external exam of English language; subjects like geography and science through school-based assessment as well
- Secondary – public examination (written) and school-based assessment (oral)
- Special arrangements for students with special needs
- School-based assessment in use
- New assessment system from 2011:
  - combination of SBA, external, psychometric and physical activity assessment
- Concerns among teachers: lack of clarity in terms of their role;  
top-down approach; time constraints; professional development





# New Zealand (East & Scott, 2011)

- Assessment reform in foreign language education (e.g., French)
- Equal weighting of listening, speaking, reading and writing
- One third classroom-based assessment
- Focus on communicative and authentic language tasks
- Assessment of spoken interaction
- Collection of students' spoken and written interactions (inside and outside classroom)
- Student selection of evidence guided by teachers (language portfolio)

# Thailand (Prapphal, 2008)



- Curriculum reform in 1999 – move towards communicative language teaching
- Introduction of school-based assessment by government
- BUT emphasis on standardised English language tests due to university entry requirement (TOEFL scores)
- Huge impact of university entry requirement on school assessment
- Teachers not supported professionally
- Lack of language assessment literacy among teachers
- Private tutoring and coaching schools for test preparation



# English in Action Study

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# English in Action



A large-scale English language development programme funded by UKAid, implemented by the Government of Bangladesh

Aim: Contribute to the economic development of Bangladesh by providing English language as a tool for better access to the world economy

Target audience – 25 million learners

Primary school teachers and students

Secondary school teachers and students

Adult learners

Implementation period - 2009 to 2017

Three phases - pilot, up-scaling and institutionalisation

# EIA study: Background



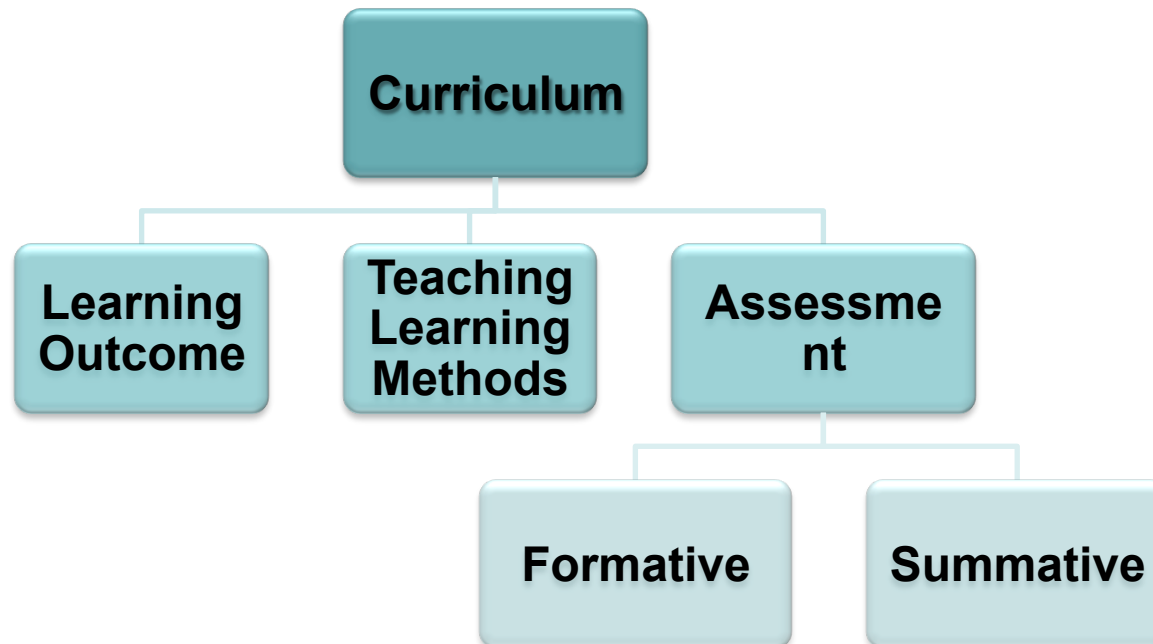
- In 1974, Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission reported the need for introducing external and internal examinations for student assessment.
- In 1977, National Curriculum and Textbook Board stated that assessment should be held as a continuous process.
- Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) were introduced in 1992.
- School Based Assessment (SBA) is functioning at the secondary level since 2004.
- Since 1986, English became a compulsory subject from grade one to twelve.
- During the 90s', there was an increased focus on using 'Communicative Approach' to English Language Teaching (ELT).



# EIA study: Objectives



- To explore the level of alignment between the secondary English language curriculum and current assessment practices



# EIA study: Key findings



- Most teachers shared partial views about the concept of curriculum.
- Communicative approach removes students' fear about learning English and being assessed.
- The 'question and answer technique' is used the most for formative assessment purposes.
- English in Action teachers are assessing all four language skills through formative assessment techniques.
- Teachers believe assessment and feedback play two types of roles in learning - they help students to perform better and teachers to improve their teaching.
- School Based Assessment (SBA) is not implemented properly in all schools – lack of standardized practice.
- Assessment of listening and speaking skills remain neglected in summative assessments.

# Conclusions and implications



- Clear policy on language assessment
- Teacher professional development on language assessment before implementing a new assessment system
- Focus on communication (i.e., meaning making) with the integration of accuracy (including grammar)
- Assessment literacy among students (and parents/ community)
- Involvement of students in language assessment (e.g., self-assessment, peer assessment, language portfolio)
- Hands-on experience of classroom-based assessment for teachers
- Focus on continuous assessment rather than 'snap-shot' assessment
- Consideration of university entrance exams and reform if needed
- Consideration of using technology in language assessment (e.g., mobile devices)



# Questions & comments?

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